

Nerima Home Companion: Paying Respects

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Summary: Ranma in the style of Garrison Keillor: twenty years in the future, Soun Tendo passes away, and...

Nerima Home Companion: Paying Respects

[The stage is dimly lit, and empty, and the audience awaits the featured

>speaker. He walks onstage, carrying a metre-high three-legged stool.

He sets it down, center stage front, and as the spotlight falls upon

>him, we notice the dark circles under his eyes. He has aged twenty

years or so since we recall him, but it is clearly Hikaru Gosunkugi.

>His days of dabbling with voodoo long behind him, he now holds forth

weekly on this very stage, and his gravy-like voice (well, it's brown

>and lumpy, anyway, as he would say) is carried across Japan on NHK

public radio.

>
[The audience is silent as he begins his monologue:]

>
"It's been a quiet week in the Nerima district of Tokyo, my hometown...
>
=====

>
NERIMA HOME COMPANION:

>Paying Respects
a Ranma 1/2 fanfiction by Ukyou Kuonji

>
with all respect paid to Rumiko Takahashi and Garrison Keillor
>
=====

>
It's been a quiet week in the Nerima district of Tokyo, my hometown --

>which is really rather unusual. Even more so, when you consider all

the folks that showed up there again after long absences. Soun Tendo

>passed away a little while back, and everybody, but everybody had to

return to pay their respects.

>
Even me. I don't go back very often, I'll admit, for all the talking

>I do about the place. Matter of fact, it's all the talking I do that

tends to render me somewhat unwelcome there. The district got enough

>unwanted publicity back in the days when a Ms. Takahashi made a comic

book series out of the strange goings-on there when I was still in high

>school. Now, the fact that a former resident is making a profit off

the curious events in Nerima is sufficient for some to regard me as a

>bit of a turncoat. I can understand it, and I accept it. So I stay

away, most of the time. Like Nabiki, I still have my sources, though.

>
But for Mr. Tendo's funeral, I had to go back. Besides, there's

>something about a funeral that causes everyone to be more civil. You

remember how long it's been since you've last seen so-and-so, and how

>they don't look as good as they used to, and how you'd better make

their last remembrance of you as pleasant as possible. Meanwhile,

>they're thinking the same thing about you, so all around, everyone

acts a little nicer toward everyone else, and everyone feels a little

>more comfortable. That's an important thing in a place like Nerima,

where comfort can be a fleeting commodity.

>
Not only were folks actually civil for a change, but even the mourning

>itself was rather subdued. Not that there weren't plenty of tears for

old man Tendo -- he was a good man, and he'll be sorely missed -- but

>the flow wasn't anything more than he himself could have conjured up

from his own eyes, given a good excuse... or even a flimsy one. Even

>then, it was enough to eclipse the funeral of former PM Hashimoto, as

far as actual grief goes.

>
Even the district councilmen sent a ridiculously large wreath to the

>dojo in his memory. As if the place wasn't conspicuous enough already,
now Ranma and Akane had to contend with this eight-foot crepe, sagging

>under the weight of Kami alone knows how many and what kind of flowers.
There was no good place to put it but outside the gates until the actual

>funeral. Only Ryoga himself could miss the place now. Neither Akane nor Ranma liked the thing, but it wouldn't be polite to just get rid of it.

>Nor would they let their son Akima use it as a practice dummy, much as Ranma may have liked the idea in theory. Their younger daughter

>Noriko suggested picking a few flowers out at a time and bringing them
to her flower-arranging class. Unfortunately, at that rate, she figured

>it might take a year or so to dismantle the thing...

>It's really rather strange, having a funeral in Nerima. Sometimes you'd think no one ever dies here. Certainly, Happosai and Cologne are

>both still alive and kicking, proof positive that only the good die young. Or is it that only the young die good?

>
So I had to go a see what it would be like, and to possibly even catch up with a lot of people I hadn't seen in a while. Once I got out on the road, though, I remembered one other reason why I hadn't been back

>in so long. I may only live a few wards away, nearer to downtown Tokyo, but it still takes some three hours to drive out there, with all

>the traffic and the convoluted roads -- and the inevitable construction
(or destruction) projects.

>
Needless to say, all that travel makes one both hungry and nostalgic,

>and Ucchan's Okonomiyaki-ya is the perfect place to satisfy both needs
even now. As I walked in, I recognized a number of regulars as

>classmates from Furinkan -- in fact, I dare say the entire chem club
had shown up there for lunch today. Of course, they'd long since

>traded in their high-collared school uniforms for the jacket and tie of
the engineer salaryman, but with their glasses and shirt pockets

>bulging with pens, you could tell they were the same nerds they'd been
in high school; they were just older, and making a living with it,

>rather than being ostracized for it.

>Ukyou continues to tend the grill, side-by-side with Konatsu. Age
hasn't caught up with their appearances, but there's certainly a world-

>weariness in Ukyou's eyes that wasn't there before, at least, not to
this extent. The two of them seem to have weathered thick and thin

>together over the past nearly twenty years -- they'd be a perfect
match, you know. But try asking if there's more than appearances to

>their arrangement, and Konatsu will just smile sadly. And Ukyou?
Well, depending on her mood, she might send you flying out the door

>courtesy of her trademark spatula, or just laugh mirthlessly. She
never got over Ranma's marriage, and claims to have joined the ranks of

>inveterate spinsters from that day forth. Others aren't so sure...
there are whispers that she and Konatsu may well marry or get married,

>but it'll be a secret thing when it happens, and she'll deny it to her
dying day -- unless one of them get pregnant, and I'm not quite sure

>which one it'll be that does.

>As you well know, 'okonomi-yaki' means 'as you like it,' or words to
that effect, and Ucchan's lives up to that. Up to a point. You can

>have anything to eat that you want, provided that it's okonomi-yaki.
There once was a poor fool who made the mistake of asking if the place

>served ramen. He was given what could be diplomatically referred to as
'an invitation to the world,' and he got to see most of it upon being

>sent into low Earth orbit for his transgression.

>Ramen, in particular, is a touchy subject with Ukyou, because it's a
constant reminder of her real arch-rival, Shampoo. Never mind that

>both of them lost in the battle for Ranma's heart, and never mind
that
Ukyou has always gotten on well with Akane, the one who
defeated them

>both. The two restaurateurs just don't get along, though it doesn't

ever seem to have much to do with the restaurant business. Maybe
it

>has to do with Shampoo's husbands...

>Since losing Ranma, Shampoo has gone through five husbands in the

course of fifteen years. Now, this would normally be a major
topic of

>local gossip, but this is Nerima, and everyone there is above that
sort
of thing. Besides, they all know the story, anyway. Turns
out that

>defeating an Amazon is the easy part. What's hard is to conquer her

every night, night after night. Apparently, her stamina in the
boudoir

>is unmatchable by any male, although five strong men have died of

exhaustion so far trying to prove otherwise. So, she's got quite
a

>collection of white cheongsams to wear to the funeral: A five-time

widow must dress the part, after all.

>
The irony is that the one person who probably could have
satisfied her

>and survived she has passed over all five times. Believe it or not,

Mousse still works at the NekoHanten, still cleaning up the
place,

>still too gentle to actually beat Shampoo up as tradition demands,

still believing the she'll come to her senses naturally some day.
And

>still wearing those rotten glasses, too. He tried contact lenses one

time, and upon seeing the world clearly for the first time,
decided he

>didn't like it. What he saw must have been just too intense for him.

Between Shampoo's unreachable beauty and Cologne's indescribable

>ugliness, it didn't surprise me one bit to find out he was back to
his
glasses within a week. Besides, he was seeing spots in the
cafe he'd

>missed umpteen times while cleaning that had transformed into

intractable stains. Even industrial-strength cleansers couldn't
get

>the dirt out that he was seeing. Best not to see it, and at least

think the job is done, than to see clearly that the job will
never

>get done sufficiently.

>I'm not sure I agree with his point of view, personally. A clear
image
of some other girl might be preferable to the fuzzy vision
he has of

>Shampoo, and he might come to his senses. Of course, I'm one to

talk: I can't bear the thought of sticking something in my eye
like

>that to begin with; so here I am wearing glasses as I'm telling you

this. Still, it allows me a sort of folksy, homespun look that
serves

>me well.

>I should point out at this juncture that I wasn't the only one to
have
come in from downtown Tokyo for this occasion - Nabiki Tarou
had

>actually come in several days earlier in order to make most of the

funeral arrangements. Yes, you heard me right: Nabiki TAROU. Old

>Pansuto never did manage to get his name changed, but there was a point
>a number of years back when some American tourist interrupted him

>during one of his usual Hoppo-related tirades. The gaijin pointed out that, to his ears, 'Pansuto' sounded more like 'pantsuit' than 'pantyhose.'

>It was like divine inspiration had struck. Tarou thanked the Yank profusely (had the fellow only known how rare an occasion this was, he would have considered himself the luckiest man on earth), went out and traded in his hosiery and dragon-scale tunic for a couple of Italian-made suits, and went into business as a stockbroker. Of course, what the Yank had failed to mention was that pantsuits were worn primarily by American businessWOMEN, but Kami knows, I'm not about to be the one
to break the news to him.

>
Pansuto took to the stock market like a fish to water, as well he might. Between his remarkable intellect and utter contempt for others,
this was a profession that suited him very nicely, if you'll pardon the expression. His 'people are idiots' attitude served him well at the Nikkei, which was just about to turn into a feast for the bearish. And despite his cursed form, Tarou was a bear among bears. He made massive
fortunes daily, feeding off companies grown fat and lazy, investing (if that is the proper term for it) in fleets of corporate jets to fly off
to worldwide meetings, mahogany desks for the big honchos, and grandiloquent skyscrapers in downtown Tokyo rather than actually plowing their earnings back into their operations, where it might do them some good. The news that 'the Minotaur is knocking' sent many a CEO scurrying off in fear, trying to figure out what to jettison in order to render his company seaworthy in the eyes of investors. All to
no avail. For Tarou to sell a company short was a virtual death knell, and the other bears on the Nikkei followed him everywhere.

>Needless to say, such moneymaking ability was not about to escape the
notice of Nabiki Tendo, who hadn't seen a man with such financial acumen since the days when she was still dating (if you could call it
that) Kinnosuke. It wasn't long before she challenged him to a stock-picking contest, which, much to his surprise (but not hers) she won. They began going out together, and Tarou was astonished as he began interfacing with a mind as sharp and contemptuous as his own -- and loving every minute of it. Of course, marrying Nabiki meant having 'fem-boy' as a brother-(sister?)-in-law, but Ranma was enough fun to tease that having to deal with him was reasonably worthwhile. And what the hell... it wasn't as if he HAD to drop in on the dojo very

often;
just the occasional family function now and again.

>
Not even then sometimes, as I found out to my peril. When I finished

>with my meal, I went straight from the Ucchan to the dojo, only to find
the place deserted. Turns out, the funeral was being held at the Tofu

>Clinic. I guess I should have known. Martial artists may meet and fight
at the dojo, and they still do -- I hardly need to mention that, you've

>heard me tell about so many times -- but social gatherings (I mean those
without fighting at their center) revolve around food, and there is

>none greater than Kasumi Ono when it comes to that. Besides, the quiet
gentle nature of herself and her dear doctor are a refreshing oasis, a

>sea of tranquility in the urban moonscape that is Nerima. No one pointed
out the irony of using a doctor's office for a memorial service; Soun

>deserved a quiet dignified send-off, and if he couldn't get it at the
clinic, he wouldn't get one anywhere, and everyone knew it.

>

>
Folks don't go in much for irony here in Nerima, or there would have been

>a fair amount of commentary about the examination table upon which
Soun was laid out in his casket. Not more than two weeks before,

>Shampoo had been lying on that selfsame table, face-down. She had
endured one of the main indignities of being a victim of a Jusenkyo

>curse. Whereas Genma will now and again wind up behind bars, treated
like the endangered species his cursed form is (and, to be fair, loving

>every minute of it), and Ryoga occasionally is threatened with becoming
someone's next meal (thank heavens that Nerimans seem to insist on

>boiling their meat before actually cooking it), so Shampoo has to deal
with malicious children every so often. A pair of teenage boys found

>her wandering around, and decided to tie a string of cans to her tail.
In her human form, she practically needed the services of a proctologist

>to remove them... fortunately, Dr. Tofu is sufficiently skilled as a
general practitioner that this did not pose him a great deal of

>difficulty.

>Once freed of this nuisance, Shampoo set about getting even with her
t tormentors. As it turned out, they weren't all that hard to find.

>There are some folks that still don't seem to know about the curses,
and these boys were apparently among them. So they never thought to

>hide from Shampoo when she went out looking for them. Of course, if
they'd known, they would never have been so stupid as to pick *that*

>cat to tease... but this is Nerima, after all, where everyone's entitled
to be as stupid as they choose to be.

>
Indeed, not only didn't they hide from her, they actually showed up at

>the NekoHanten shortly after Shampoo's little medical procedure.
She spotted them straightaway, and shoved Mousse aside to wait

>on them personally.

>"Can Shampoo take your order?"

>One of the boys gave a snorty nose-laugh ("Fhhnn-hhnn!"), while the other
grinned. "I dunno... you gonna gave us a bottle for us to yell our orders

>into it?" Shampoo's eye twitched at this, but she struggled to keep a
smile on her face... it was starting to get tight enough to hurt.

>
"You know what Shampoo mean. You ready order, yes?"

>
The Snorter waved her off. "Not just yet, okay? We're gonna take our

>time with this." She responded with a noncommittal look before turning
around and heading for the kitchen, trying to figure out what to do next.

>It was then that she heard them:

>"D'ja get a load of the dumb chink?" "Hhnn-hhnn-hhnn." High falsetto:
"'Can Shampoo take your order?'" "Hhnn-hhnn-hhnn."

>
That tore it. She put on the sweetest face she could muster, spun around,

>and headed back to their table. She had to make an effort, though, not
to appear *too* eager.

>
"Shampoo forget! Have chef specials in kitchen... you come see and choose,

>yes?" She took the Snorter by the hand, and the other kid barely had time
to protest before she'd grabbed his in turn. It wasn't too long before

>they found themselves in the NekoHanten kitchens.

>The Smart-aleck looked around, but didn't see anything prepared for him
and his buddy to choose from. "Okay... so, uh, where's the specials?"

>
"You just wait." Shampoo was already up on a stepstool, reaching for a

>packet of powder. "Shampoo mix special drink for you two... Hiba-chan!"

>Cologne's head popped into view, and the boys clutched each other in
fear and surprise. "What is it, Shampoo?" Then, the old woman noticed

>the two alarmed boys, and her face wrinkled (assuming there was room for
more on her face) in irritation. "You two are new faces around here, I

>take it..."

>They relaxed their grip on each other as they realized they were talking
to a person rather than some ghostly troll. Matter of fact, they backed

>away from each other rather hurriedly, as it occurred to them that they
had been holding onto each other. "Uh... yeah, that's true..."

>
Shampoo handed the packet to Cologne, and gabbled something to her in

>the Amazon dialect. Cologne nodded as she took the powder, taking a
quick glance at the boys, who were now back to their insolent selves.

>Even more so, as the old troll hopped away, returning in less than a
minute with a pitcher full of ice cold water.

>
"Special drink, huh?" Smartass was staring at the pitcher.

"Whatcha got

>in there, some 'ancient Chinese secret'? Huh?"

>"Hhhnnn-hhnn."

>Shampoo just smiled, and set the pitcher down on the counter next to the
two boys. "Is something like that. Shampoo get glasses for you two."

>She clambered up onto the counter to reach for some rather elaborate-
looking mugs...

>
...and in rummaging around, kicked the pitcher of instant Maoniichuan

>over onto the two boys. "Ooops! Shampoo so clumsy! Must dry stupid
boys off!" But of course, they weren't boys at this point.

>
She leaped down from the counter, and grabbed the two cats by their haunches. Both of them were squirming frantically trying to get out
of this madwoman's grasp. But they were fighting against three thousand years of Amazon tradition; there was no way they were about to free
themselves.

>
Until one of them, in his terror, simply lost control. Even a revenge-bent Shampoo isn't going to hold onto a cat when it's wetting on her.
She let go, and the cat landed rather hard on its back. It took only a second or two to recover, and began scrambling off in whatever
direction it could, trying to escape.

>
But Shampoo has more experience at being a cat than most folks, including these boys. So while the escapee managed to get out of the NekoHanten,
he didn't get much farther before being caught. Once she had both cats well in hand, she proceeded to tie their tails *together*. The two cats
attempted to run off in different directions, and wound up dragging each other in a direction that lay somewhere between their individual
destinations. Shampoo smiled maliciously. That'd teach them. Their rear ends would be so sore from all that pulling, it'd be as effective
as having given them both a thorough spanking, without the possibility of their enjoying it, like Mousse might.

>Say what you will about eye-for-an-eye vigilante justice, it certainly
gives the former victim a great deal of satisfaction. Shampoo even went so far as to say that at that moment, as she went scrambling after the
escapee, and later, as she watched the two cats skitter through the NekoHanten alley in a sort of zig-zag route, she had never felt so...
alive. Not human, maybe, but alive. And that's what matters, ne?

>

>
Lying on that same examination table, Soun, on the other hand, was quite clearly dead. To be sure, he looked pretty good, as tasteless
and cliche that might be to say of a corpse. His skin, though somewhat pale, was unwrinkled despite his nearly seventy years, years in which
the rivers of tears he cried might have etched canyons on a lesser

> man's face. His hair, too, was still quite full and dark, a situation

even Ranma is beginning to envy as he approaches the milestone
>of his fortieth year. But that's another story, and shall be told at

another time.

>
There is no talk about how it happened, which strikes me as rather

>odd. Certainly, if a martial artist dies fighting, it is a matter of great

honor (and perhaps vengeance); if a suicide, one would expect certain

>reactions in accordance with the situation. I don't recall anything

being said about any long illness, either...

>
And it's not like Nerima keeps its secrets very well; if nothing else,

>there's always Nagisa, the elder Saotome daughter, who's following

in her aunt Nabiki's footsteps. If you really need information - and
>can afford it - she's the one to go to. But even she's not talking.

She's never one to admit when she doesn't know, though...

>
[Gosunkugi pauses to run his hand meaningfully through his own
>greying hair]

>Personally, I think he's been dyeing his hair all this time, and

whatever's in that stuff finally caught up with him. Folks around

>here are generally suspicious of chemicals, and for good reason

(witness most folks' reaction to Kodachi Kunou, after all). Of course,

> maybe I'm just jealous, too...

>*****

>The funeral itself, as I said before, was quite civil for Nerima.
Genma did his part to set a sober mood. Not once did he turn into a

>panda, and even at the buffet table in the kitchen, he was quite

restrained -- he only took three helpings of curried chicken with

>rice. When he walked up to the casket, he set up the Go board on

his old friend's chest. He wasn't going to be playing Go again, anyway.

>Both he and Soun had tried to teach Nodoka the game, but she just
didn't play fair; she simply wouldn't let them cheat. So with Soun gone,

>all the fun was out of the game, and Genma knew it. In tribute to his
longtime partner, he had set the board up on Soun's chest in an endgame

>position for black to win -- Soun's color. At the last, Genma had cheated
to give Soun the victory.

>
Happosai added a tribute of his own to his weak-willed disciple; a pair

>of purple silk panties with a sheer mesh in the front panel. Typical

Happosai. Some folks were quite naturally disgusted, others were curious

>as to whose they might have been (some even whispered that Happi was

finally returning a pair that had belonged to Soun's long-dead wife),

>and others realized, looking at the garment, that this was a great

sacrifice indeed for the Master to make, and high praise indeed for

>his former student.

>Of course, not everyone approached Happi's offering with such reverence:
"Frederique! Frederique!"

>
A short, pudgy woman bounded forward to the casket, and nimbly slipped the panty from Soun's fingers. She clutched it to her own breast as if it was
hers, and from her demeanor, it was pretty clear she already thought it was.

>
"Azusa, set that back where it belongs... have a little respect for the dead,

>will you?" Mikado Sanzenin approached his wife, snatching the garment from
her and placing it back in the casket. Azusa's eyes went wide and teary,

>and then she began to look wildly about for something, anything... she had
to get her Fredrique back from Mikki-chan.

>
She grabbed The Wreath.

>
"Give me back my Fredrique!" Mikado stared, transfixed, as eight feet of solid flowers came crashing down upon him. As unconsciousness descended
upon him with the flowers, he wondered why he had been so stupid as to sleep

>with his dim-bulb partner some eighteen years ago, and wind up forced into
'doing the right thing' by her when something went horribly wrong shortly

>thereafter. He had spent the last eighteen years discovering just how
horribly wrong things had gone.

>
So had their son. Seventeen-year-old Naruhito Sanzenin buried his face in

>his hands, and was wondering for the umpteen-millionth time very much the
same thought as his father was. His parents never failed to embarrass him

>in public. Between his mother's weird kleptomania and his father's
philandering, he was convinced that he had drawn nearly the worst parents in

>the world. He never went so far in his mind as to wish that his mother had
gotten an abortion rather than marry his father, but he certainly wished

>time and again that the two idiots that he was forced to call 'parents' had
used some kind of protection... or maybe not 'done it' at all! Why, if

>they'd delayed by a few seconds, someone else could have put their quarter
into the great cosmic vending machine before they had, and he could have

>wound up with a completely different set of parents, maybe in a completely
different part of the world. Why, he wondered, couldn't he have been born

>to some nice couple in Minnesota, say, where things are quiet and normal,
and parents don't embarrass their children the way Mikado and Azusa did to

>Naruhito? He couldn't even muster the nerve to ask a girl out, for fear
that she might run away screaming upon meeting the Golden Pair of Fools.

>
Just as this thought crossed his mind, a vision stood up to confront his

>squabbling parents (Mikado had by this time recovered from the blow to
the head, and was matching his wife decibel for decibel). A girl of

>about sixteen, clad in flowing white, like an angel or goddess, eyes
filled with righteous fury. "Will you two idiots STOP THIS AT ONCE!"

>Her image filled Naruhito's gaze: *this* was a girl he could take

home
without fear. He watched, transfixed, as she pulled a coin from her
>pocket...
>...and drained all the fight out of his parents, who fell to the floor
unconscious and shrivelled. The girl transformed into a voluptuous
>brunette of some forty years, and Naruhito's face fell. Only his hands
were there to catch it before it landed in his lap.

>

>
Perhaps Naruhito would have found comfort in the fact that he was not
>alone when it came to being embarrassed by his parents. Of course, he
would have been unaware of Yoiko Hibiki's frustration, as neither she
>nor her parents had arrived at the clinic yet. In fact, that was the
main cause of her fury. Couldn't her mom lay off the submissive wife
>bit long enough to insist she take the wheel? It was obvious her dad
was clueless as to how to get back to Nerima, a place where he *claimed*
>to have spent a great deal of time. Yoiko had inherited her mother's
sense of direction, which was a good thing, but her father's temper,
>and her father's sense of direction tended to be what set it off.

>The only good thing she could say about her father in this situation was
that at least he was willing to ask for directions. But even when he asked,
>somehow the information always got tangled up somewhere between the
man's ears and his brain - assuming he *had* one, which Yoiko was prone
>to doubt much of the time:
>Pointing ahead: "So I head south to route...?"
>"That's west, dear."
>"Oh. So I need to turn... "
>"Left, daddy." The tires squeal as the car turns. "DADDY! I said LEFT!
Mommmy!!"
>
"Now, honey, your daddy's been here many times in the past..."

>
Sotto voce: "By accident..."
>
"What was that?"
>
"Nothing, daddy."
>
And so on. Yoiko would glance at her watch from time to time... and
>occassionally it would be glowing with chi energy she'd built up from
fuming at the situation. It wasn't that she was in any hurry to get to
>the funeral - she didn't know Soun Tendo from Adam, and didn't care -
but she had friends she'd met on the Internet that she wanted to try
>to look up while she was in town. She was looking forward to all the
sophisticated things they might do together in the big city - riding
>the subway, shopping the Ginza, visiting some place they called
Soapland... it all sounded like a fairy tale.
>
Akari fretted a bit herself. She was sorely tempted to take the wheel -
>surely she wanted to pay her respects to the families that had helped
bring her and Ryoga-sama together, and unless he

relinquished the
>driving to her, they would not have a chance - but as for Yoiko...

there were temptations to the big city that were too much for a
pig
>farmer's daughter from nothern Honshu. She looked back over her

shoulder at her daughter, steaming in her pink sweatshirt with
the
>English legend "I am curious (yellow)" emblazoned diagonally
across
 it from shoulder to hip. Yes, she was too curious for her
own good.
>Better that they not find their way, and she not meet up with those

unsavory characters she'd met on the computer. Who knew what

>they might do to her?

>Each of the Hibikis were so lost in their own thoughts that they
never
noticed when the skyscrapers were upon them. What finally
shook
>each of them was when Ryoga took yet another wrong turn, and ran

into... a hearse. Akari smiled as Ryoga got out to inspect the
damage.
>She had gotten both wishes: they'd made it in time to pay respects

to Soun, and the car would be unavailable for Yoiko to wander
into
>temptation.

>Yoiko buried her face in her lap, as she realized the same thing as

her mother had. She didn't notice as the driver of the hearse,
after
>determining that the 10 kph collision hadn't really affected his
vehicle,
clapped her father on the back, nor did she notice a
second man her
>father's age, dressed in a red Chinese shirt come up to them, asking

for room in her father's car, muttering something about "kids
these
>days...not willing to walk only a couple of miles." She *did*
notice,
however, as her door opened, and she was suddenly joined
by Akima
>Saotome, Yoichi Ono, and Naruhito Sanzenin, while the two Saotome

sisters crowded up front with her mother.
>
Ryoga got back into the car, backed it up a few yards (still
well within
>eyeshot of the hearse), and fell in line behind it as it resumed its
slow
crawl to the crematorium. Suddenly she felt very shy, as she
said
>her hellos to the three boys crammed against her. This wasn't
turning
out to be a total loss...
>
And as the older folks crowded around the two cars, making all
manner
>of noise, I got into my own car and drove off in the opposite
direction.
After all, I had a three-hour drive into downtown
Tokyo to make, and
>I wanted to get home at a reasonable hour. The ol' body needs its

sleep... it ain't what it used to be, you know...
>

>And that's the News from Nerima...
where all the women are strong
(and how!)...
>all the men are... well, they aren't always men, actually...
and
all the craziness is above average.
>

>
I sent this incomplete story well over a year ago, and I've
finally gotten

>around to wrapping it up. This is the sort of thing that looks like
it could
become a passable continuing series. There's also a
large section that
>includes my earlier side story "Tied to the Tail," but I decided to
leave it in
in somewhat abridged format just for the heck of it.

>
I've had a great fondness for Garrison Keillor's works that
harks back
>a long ways, and when the challenge went out to imitate an
well-known
author in a regulation fanfic, it occurred to me to
mimic his style. Once
>I started on this story in earnest, I did try to flip through
'Leaving Home'
and 'Lake Wobegon Days' to try and maintain his
understated style,
>but for the most part, the problem is that Nerima (and the
characters
therein) is wild and crazy while Lake Wobegon is quiet
and ordinary.
>So I decided to focus on the how everyone has changed over time,

and I figured as long as the intro and the ending rang similarly,
and the
>stuff in the middle rambled a bit (I'm good at that, anyway),
everything
would turn out fairly well.
>
I've got another story for this series already in the works -
it's alluded
>to within the body of the tale; the first person to correctly spot
the
reference gets a cookie and a possible cameo in a future fic
- but
>gosh only knows when *that*ll be ready for publication: I've
discovered,
 much to my embarrassment, that my unfinished fics now
outnumber
>my completed ones, and after two-plus years of this, that's saying

quite a bit.
>
Anyway, it's a draft... comments are always welcome, you know.

>
Itsu mo,
>Ucchan ^_^

>P.S. My web site's finally been updated! Yay! Drop by when you

get the chance:

>
<http://members.aol.com/ukyoukwnji/index.htm>
>

End
file.